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Buon Natale!

Wherever you come from in the States, you will know when it's the Holiday Season in Italy. Imagine the weather not too cold and boxes and boxes of Christmas cakes hanging and adorning department stores and supermarkets. Main streets dress up for the season, too.

The holidays are celebrated all over Italy in a similar fashion. Christmas Eve evening meal (il cenone) takes place late in the evening and is fish oriented a game of tombola (bingo) is played, and the evening ends with midnight mass.

On Christmas day, a large lunch is served to friends and family and can last all day. The festivity extends to the following day called, Santo Stefano (Saint Stephen). People whose names are Stephanie, Stephen or the like, celebrate their name day while the rest of Italy sit down to another meal consisting primarily of veggies and pork. One only lives once, right?

Be sure to visit the nativity scene in the local churches. And, try to experience the town of Maranola (a district of Formia) to see the LIVE nativity scene. MWR always does a bus tour.

Il sciucio is another example of experiencing a "different" kind of holiday season. Traditionally, il sciucio consisted of bagpipers (zampognari) who came to town from nearby hills or countryside playing a tune, wishing people a Happy New Year. Today, il sciucio consists of various players, mainly young people, who play guitars, drums and a barrel-like, man-made instrument. They go around to people's homes, and shops, playing a "good luck" tune. A monetary exchange is expected.

New Year's Eve is an all night affair with fireworks at midnight and dancing till the wee hours of the morning winding down with a quick stop at a café for cappuccino and a sweet roll.

Christmas season ends with the Feast of the Epiphany, on January 6. The evening before, Italian children set out their shoes for the female Santa Claus, La Befana, to fill with gifts of all kinds like toys, candies and fruit. If the children were good, their shoes would be filled. If they were bad, they would find their shoes filled with coal. La Befana is the best-known legend in Italy

Buon Natale and have a happy and safe holiday season. Cin, cin!

